

Near
East

AMERICA'S STAKES
in the
MIDDLE EAST

*Being a summary of talks
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AMERICA'S STAKES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

"The only thing I know about the Middle East," remarked a friend at one of my recent lectures, "is that there the girls always dance sheikh to sheikh!" This is typical of a generation that saw in the Arab world only a place of deserts and hareems. But the Middle East has long passed out of such an aura of romanticism; it is now an area vital to the world and, in particular, vital to the United States. Indeed, America is on the way to becoming a major influence in these Eastern lands, and only recently have we been told by the President that we must invest money and personnel to safeguard that influence. What has drawn America into the Middle East, and what are our stakes there?

STABILITY

America's first stake in the Middle East is that of world political stability. Many areas today are characterized by political restlessness, but three regions in particular are central to world peace. The first is China; the second is Central Europe, on a line drawn from Poland through the Balkans; and the third is the Middle East. All are important for the same reason: they are marginal areas, lying between the Great Powers, whose interests and tensions come to a focus and are reflected in local movements and problems.

Upset any of these three apple carts, and there will be a world scramble for their fruit!

But what are the political interests that focus in the Middle East and make its situations so potent in the world scene? The first is that of *Great Britain*, long the leading Western power in the area. Great Britain came into the Middle East during the 19th century because of the communications demand of its growing Empire. For the Middle East to the British Empire is like Chicago to the United States—any travel from East to West eventually lands you there. And however the British Empire may change its spots in the future, it will remain a vast network of trade and political influence that cannot exist without utilizing the Chicago of world travel—the Middle East.

Yet if Great Britain needs to continue some measure of influence in Middle East lands, she needs equally to win the cooperation and good will of the Middle East governments. For one thing, Britain can no longer afford to be the world's policeman, either in men or money; she must depend more largely on the efforts of friendly allies and less on the domination of colonies. Again, Great Britain needs the trade of the Middle East, and trade is built on good will. But more basically, Britain is in debt to Middle East countries. She owes Egypt, Pal-

estine, and Iraq sterling balances amounting to 686 million pounds—and these balances cannot be scaled down or paid without the cooperation of Middle East governments. Thus Britain is caught in a dilemma: her Empire (which is her life) must continue to utilize the Middle East, yet she cannot utilize it without the help of the people who live there. The symbol of this dilemma is the impasse to which the current Anglo-Egyptian treaty negotiations have come, where British needs and Egyptian aspirations have clashed so completely that the matter has been referred to the Security Council of the United Nations.

The second political influence is that of *Russia*. It must be remembered that Russia is playing a return engagement on the Middle East stage—she has been there before. Indeed, almost from the days of Peter the Great, Russia has been pushing toward the Dardanelles and the Indian Ocean. Thus, Russia is not in the Middle East primarily because she is Communistic, or feels the missionary urge of a world economic evangel; Russia is in the Middle East because she is Russia and is driven by certain basic historic and geographic pressures.

What are Russian objectives? I would place first her desire for bargaining power. To maintain a place in successful international negotiations, it still seems necessary

to have poker chips. And the Middle East makes a good poker pile; pressure exerted on this vital area of British (and growing American) influence will give Russia bargaining power in the councils of the world. Russia's second objective is oil, of which the Middle East is the richest and most accessible reservoir. More fundamentally, Russia has always been interested in finding some bridge out of the isolation imposed on her by geography into the center of world influence. Here is the Middle East, lying across the southern warm weather, warm water borders of Russia, opening not onto one center of world influence but two — westward to the Mediterranean and eastward to the Indian Ocean. That Russia should be interested in this bridge to the outer world is as natural as that Great Britain should be interested in its facilities as a communication route.

To the interests of Great Britain and Russia must be added the growing national consciousness of the *Middle East* peoples. Ever since the first World War, Middle East nationalism has been on the rise, expressing the determination of one of the world's great medieval civilizations to be reestablished on the modern scene. Each Middle East country has developed a strong political feeling that demands independence and freedom to run its own affairs; and all have

combined in the Arab League to present a united front to the pressures of the West. Whatever the character of these governments, they represent a genuine national feeling, and must be taken into account in preserving the stability of the Middle East.

Here, then, are three major political interests—British, Russian, and Middle East—focused on the same spot. Is it not obvious that such tension when coupled to the question of the Dardanelles, Palestine or the autonomy of Azerbaijan, may lead to a disastrous split among the Great Powers? It is to prevent this that the United States is in the Middle East. Our first stake there is the stake of political stability; we do not want the apple cart ~~itself~~ *upset*.

OIL

America's second stake in the Middle East is that of oil. At the end of the first World War the oil of the Middle East was important, and we in the United States demanded that we be given our share. Subsequently, two factors have highlighted Middle East oil. The first factor is that of the unbelievably large oil resources of the area. Although it is admittedly difficult to predict global petroleum reserves with complete accuracy, the most reasonable figures indicate that while the United States has within its continental borders about 10 per cent of the world's oil, and Russia possibly 20 per

cent, the Middle East has 30 per cent. The second factor is the world's amazing thirst for oil. At the end of its current five-year plan, Russia will still lack from 15 to 20 million tons' annual petroleum production; while the United States, which owns one-third of the world's oil producing resources, is consuming two-thirds of the world's production. These simple figures tell their own story; no great oil-consuming country can neglect the oil potential of the Middle East.

But we must be quite clear in differentiating the commercial from the strategic aspects of Middle East oil. *Commercially*, I see no reason why the oil of this region should bring about political tension. There is enough oil in the Middle East for every needy country to have its share. Russia, France, Britain, Holland, the United States—all have commercial enterprises in the oil regions of the Middle East. Russia has her share where she best can use it—in Azerbaijan, just across the border from the great Baku oil center; Great Britain utilizes the fields in central Iran around Abadan; the oil of Mesopotamia and Bahrein is split equally between France, Britain, Holland, and the United States; and we have our own newly developed field in Saudi Arabia with its center in Dahrán. There is oil enough here for all so long as the objective is an economical commercial operation.

The matter of *strategy* is different. Here oil is not merely a commercial resource subject to the operations of supply and demand, and based on economic competition; it is an instrument of war and defense. To control it may be the deciding factor in any global struggle. Thus the first target in a world attack would be the oil of the Middle East, and the greatest resource against that attack would be firm control of the area. That is why British interest in Middle East oil is so deep, and why our own Government in 1943 considered buying out some of America's commercial interests. Already some 60 per cent of the fuel for our Pacific fleet comes from the Middle East, and we must be assured of this centrally located strategic resource if we are to maintain an international position. Any political threat to the Middle East that would shut us out from the oil fields would challenge directly our strategy of defense.

PEOPLE

Political stability and oil—these are major and understandable stakes of America. But there is a third stake we have in the Middle East, and one that in many ways is the most basic. It is our stake in people—their political ideals, their social organization, the objectives they pursue, the standards of their personal and collective life. For one of the major lessons taught us by the war is that, in

the end, it is the people of an area that make the area safe. No arrangement of armies or safeguarding of natural resources can ultimately force a region into the kind of world of peace and cooperation we envision; people must do that.

Here the situation in the Middle East is critical. Like many parts of Asia, this region is both an area of social underprivilege and of social awakening. Masses of peasantry live on a subsistence level, literacy is low, and national resources are limited. Yet the nationalist awakening is stirring the Middle East to do something about such conditions; a whole new pattern of society is coming to birth, and within the next few decades the ultimate shape of the new Middle East will be decided.

For that shape there are three possible *patterns*. The first is that of a narrow nationalism, in which the technology of the West is adopted, but not the ideals and bases of social life that underlie it. This was the way of Japan, and the result will be the result of Japan—a technically capable civilization, yet one cut off from the flow of Western, democratic life.

The second pattern is that furnished by Soviet Russia. The present governments of the Middle East are not in any sense Communist-minded, but wherever there is social distress and underprivilege, there is a seed

bed for Communistic ideas. Never have I seen as much social restlessness and resentment in the Middle East as is now evident. It is not that the peasants and workers themselves are turning to Communism, but that there is necessarily a steady march of ideas from Russia into the consciousness of the middle class group that is pressing for a place in national life. The average Middle Easterner understands economic theory as little as does his American brother, but Russia is an impressive example of planned social change, and the Middle Easterner wonders if it cannot teach him something about bettering the condition of his people.

The third possible pattern is that of our Western democracy in which free enterprise and individual creativeness are coupled with a sense of social responsibility. Of this way of life, America stands as the great example. The Middle East and its governments are eager to find some non-imperialistic frontage on the Western world from which they can obtain services and experience free from the threat of political interference. Increasingly America seems to be that frontage. This year there are nearly 2000 students from Middle East countries studying in this country at the expense of their governments, sent to discover how our political economy, social reform, and technological services work. Whether we desire

it or not, we have been thrust into a major role in helping the Middle East set the pattern of its new life.

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AT CAIRO

It is against this background that the work of an institution such as the American University at Cairo is so significant. For the problem of building a better society is the problem of education; we must have injection points through which we can contribute our social experience to other people. Treaties can safeguard political interests; oil derricks can tap hidden natural resources; but neither treaties nor derricks can reach into the minds of men and assist them there in the development of a better life. What is needed is some force that can deal with national and personal ideals, that sets the scale of moral values and orients the developing personal and social life toward the goals we feel are essential for a world of freedom and progress. To this task Christian education has a peculiar relevance, for it deals directly with the problem of values and seeks to transmit the spiritual basis on which our democratic world order is built.

It has always been a matter of satisfaction that the Egyptian Government has welcomed our enterprise so cordially. National leaders recognize that the American University at Cairo exists to share with them in

the development of their life, and they have freely drawn on our resources for work in cooperation with them. Since we pursue no political or commercial objectives, the Middle East accepts us for what we are—an instrument for making available to its peoples the intellectual and social resources of the only way of life that promises peace and good will among men. As an Egyptian political leader said recently, "Your institution has built up a spiritual relationship between us and the Western world."

That is why I class the American University at Cairo as an essential element in America's stakes in the Middle East; and that is why I have no hesitation in urging people to invest in the University. In America we pay taxes to support our political objectives; we invest in oil companies to develop petroleum resources. We need equally to underwrite the instruments that deal with ideas and help set the patterns of national life.

An Egyptian friend recently wrote to me concerning the growth of American interest in the Middle East. "So America is in the Middle East again," he said. "Then America will need friends of the make of her hands—friends who will work with her in the days that are ahead for peace." *Friends of the make of her hands*—that is a curious phrase, for it is really the translation of an

Arabic expression. It does not mean so much *friends that her hands have made*, but *friends whose hands have been set to the same tasks, that wear the same calluses because they have been plowing at the same furrows*. Do we need friends of the make of our hands? Indeed we do, for only as we and those who live in the vital Middle East—and our neighbors everywhere—work hand in hand, will the “fair new world” for which mankind longs come to reality.

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